

Tourism Expert Recommendation and Review Panel
Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 7, 2016
4:00 p.m.

Present- Cheryl Armstrong, EMU Auxiliary Services; Brenda Black, Director of Tourism and Visitor Services; Cortney Carderlli, Valley Mall; Caitlin Boyer, Young Adult; Christopher Jones, Mayor of Harrisonburg; Matthew Little, Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation; Lisa Shull, Explore More Discovery Museum; Peirce Macgill, Assistant Director of Economic Development; Erica Kann, City Clerk; Adam Shifflett, Brothers Craft Brewing; and, Richard Smith, Hampton Inn University.

Mayor Jones thanked everyone for attending and stated the agenda today is to finish up questions that hadn't been addressed during previous meetings.

Brenda stated the tourism department had already made changes to their website after discussion during the previous meeting. Brenda announced that a press release hadn't been completed, but a new promotional video could be found on the tourism's website. After watching the video the question was asked, what are your thoughts about the city's brand overall.

Mayor Jones asked Peirce to respond since he just came to the city from Baltimore. Peirce stated he loved the logo and tag line. Peirce stated there is a lot of focus on dining, would love to see more on retail. Peirce stated with being a JMU alumni he has been coming back to the area for sporting events and would love to see more options bounced off of what JMU has to offer such as the Forbes Center and Multicultural Center.

Brenda reported that an Arts tab was added a few months ago and she has been keeping tabs on the traffic going to that location. Brenda stated one of the challenges that events are growing so rapidly that it is hard to get all events on the website and added to the events calendar. Mayor Jones suggested a countdown module to upcoming events on the homepage. Brenda stated that events currently can only be added by staff, but the new module they are reviewing staff should be able to approve submitted events. Brenda stated she would check into the countdown module.

Mayor Jones asked the next question, what action step(s) could Harrisonburg take in the short term that would immediately enhance our tourism efforts. Mayor Jones provided the example of the International Festival being a great event, but no one makes tax revenue from the event. Mayor Jones stated with that example, what kind of packages and promotions could be offered to move the people attending the Festival to a different part of town.

Brenda stated a CommUnity event has been added in September and there are events every month that we should be able to capitalize on events.

There was discussion about sports tourism being fast growing and Harrisonburg needs to get involved with the opportunity to sell Harrisonburg. Brenda reported she would be attending a Sports Tourism Summit in Richmond and brought attention to sportsvirginia.org. Brenda noted that a meeting was held between EMU, JMU, and Parks and Recreation, the Turks, JMU sports, and various stakeholders after only Shenandoah Valley Sportsway was found in the search field. Brenda reported Parks and Recreation has now uploaded their parks and facilities and JMU is planning to, but they have limitations since they are a Division I school. Brenda stated if tourism knows about something, they can sell.

Mayor Jones asked what can be our Apple Blossom event. Brenda stated our signature events are Valley Fourth, International Festival, and Rocktown Beer and Music Festival and noted the cap on that event. Adam suggested that we should focus on what we do have, because he knows in Beer Festivals there has been a decrease in those who attend. Brenda stated it has been great to see hotels creating more packages and partnerships such as the Resolute Weekend.

Peirce noted the Baltimore Kinetic Sculpture Race that gets science and arts working together. Brenda noted that there is a Lego League that comes every year.

Courtney noted that a Virginia is for Lovers shirt was worn in the Walking Dead show last night. Brenda stated things like that to make connections to get Virginia and Harrisonburg out there are huge. Peirce suggested plugging every event in an organized effort with a tight social network.

It was asked what demographic are we looking to sell. Mayor Jones stated the entire family. There was discussion of how downtown is seen as a non-family scene, which internally the city is missing that benefit. It was mentioned maybe a reward or scavenger hunt should be created to get more families downtown. Lisa reported that the Children's Museum is frequently asked for lunch ideas for their visitors and that she was recently approached by Clementine's to come up with recommendations for a kids lunch menu.

Brenda stated families typically stay at the resorts, but do come to Harrisonburg to do a few activities, but we need to sell hotels and what Harrisonburg has to offer for families. It was noted that when JMU is in session, families don't come to vacation in Harrisonburg, they go to the resorts. Brenda stated every month a different demographic is seen in Harrisonburg. Richard noted that JMU football season is the only season that sports fans tend to stay in the hotels.

Discussion came back to families in the downtown area. Families with children are looking for a quick in and out restaurant and offers coloring or activity of some sort of when waiting for food. It was suggested to add a Family Fun tab to the website to let people know what restaurants around Harrisonburg have kid menus. Brenda was going to speak with Kim Kirk about the Deck of Card program she is working on to maybe be able to tie these ideas in.

Mayor Jones asked what is Harrisonburg, or an icon true to Harrisonburg. Mayor Jones pitched a 50 Friends idea, which would be different diverse icons placed throughout the city that could be used in many different ways. It was suggested to use the same base model, decorate, and then use a plaque to tell about the individual. Mayor Jones stated he would be meeting with Ande and the Arts Council tomorrow and the idea can be suggested in that meeting also to see if grant opportunities would be available.

At 5:00 p.m., Mayor Jones closed the meeting. The next meeting will be held the first Monday of April.